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INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
TREASURY FOR JEFFREY LEVINE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2011

TAGS: PGOV PREL HA

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER ALEXIS

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Jay T. Smith for reason 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Alexis called the U.S-Haiti relationship and USG assistance "indispensable" and asked for a full briefing on all assistance programs at the earliest opportunity during his first meeting with the Ambassador since the ratification of his government on June 8. The Ambassador reaffirmed US support for the Haiti, highlighting our extensive assistance program, particularly in the area of public health and education. The PM outlined his government's priorities included strengthening the parliament, reform of the police and justice sectors, a crackdown on corruption and narcotics trafficking, reinvigoration of the agricultural sector, and "jobs, jobs, jobs." He reiterated the Go's interest in Governor Jeb Bush's idea to collect Haitian import duties at ports of embarkation in Florida. The PM hoped to strengthen the role of the parliament and deal with parliamentarians grouped by geographical department, rather than along party lines. The Ambassador urged the PM to vote for Guatemala in the upcoming election for UN Security Council members. The PM assured the Ambassador that he would raise the issue with President Preval. Regarding imprisoned former-Prime Minister Neptune, the PM agreed with the Ambassador's view that his detention was unjustified, but did not indicate that his government would pro-actively seek his release. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador, accompanied by Polcouns, paid her first formal call on PM Alexis since his ratification and investiture. The Prime Minister introduced his newly-named chief of staff, Antoine Ambroise who had held the same position during the PM's previous tenure. Ambroise had just returned from the University of Quebec to take up his position. Ambroise's expertise lies in "state reform" and administration and he planned to focus on that area.

"Refine" Assistance

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador congratulated the PM on the approval of his government and general policy and affirmed our ongoing commitment to Haiti's development. She underlined that our assistance covered a broad range of areas, totaling \$148 million last year. She lamented that many Haitians, even in the government, were not aware of the

scope of U.S. assistance. The interim health minister, for instance was not aware that the USG had provided 40% of health services the previous year until the Ambassador informed him. The PM agreed that the U.S.-Haitian cooperation would remain critical and asked for a presentation of all our assistance programs. His government, he stressed, needed a complete understanding of all international assistance to "refine its effectiveness," look at the "whole picture" and integrate aid into the budget process. He understood that international donors provided the bulk of direct assistance through NGOs and he wanted to better integrate that assistance through the government. NGOs should continue to play a key role in delivering assistance, but the government needed to insure, for example, that the assistance was appropriately distributed geographically throughout the country. The Ambassador agreed to organize a briefing -- the Embassy had provided a similar briefing to members of Preval's transition team prior to his inauguration -- and noted that we would continue to provide our assistance on a programmatic basis.

Lots of Priorities

¶4. (SBU) The PM stressed that fighting corruption, narcotics trafficking and government malfeasance were among the government's top priorities. He would cooperate closely with presidential advisor Robert Manuel, who would continue to maintain responsibility for security and justice issues in the presidency. He was also optimistic about the new Justice Minister Rene Magloire, who had extensive experience in anti-corruption and anti-drug issues. The key to social stability was economic stability, and the government would also focus on, "jobs, jobs, jobs" The government had proposed its "social appeasement" program precisely to tackle the link between stability and economic conditions. Additionally, the government would focus on improving agricultural production and the conditions of farm laborers and improving vocational and professional education. The list of needs in Haiti was exhaustive, and there was no "magic wand" (baguette magique) he could wave.

¶5. (SBU) The PM noted that Governor Bush had raised with President Preval during visit for Preval's inauguration the possibility of organizing the collection of Haitian customs duties in ports of embarkation in Florida. President Preval wanted to examine the idea and asked the PM to follow-up. The PM stressed that Haiti desperately needed to increase revenue collection and that it was losing significant amounts through corruption in the customs system. The Ambassador offered to arrange for further information to be provided to President Preval during his upcoming visit to the tourism convention in Miami at the end of June.

Parliament

¶5. (SBU) Replying to the Ambassador's query regarding relations with parliament, the PM responded that parliament's role must be strengthened and that the government had appointed a minister for parliamentary relations toward that end. The parliament needed better working conditions and technical capabilities: the PM had organized a technical seminar for his cabinet and would try to do the same for the parliamentarians. The government would also work to improve the consultative process with parliament in drafting legislation. Parliament needed to be involved in legislating rather than simply voting on government's proposed laws. He planned to initiate regular consultations with the departmental delegations within the parliament. This would give each senator and deputy access to the executive and avoid the issue of showing favoritism to individual parties.

Neptune

¶6. (C) The PM noted that he expected a decision by the appellate court in Gonaives regarding former Prime Minister

Neptune and the other defendants in the case of the alleged La Scyrie massacre. The Prime Minister said he took no position on the case but that Neptune had been in prison for far too long for no good reason. The Ambassador responded that this was precisely the position of the U.S. and she hoped that the GoH would quickly release Neptune.

UN Security Council Seat

¶ 7. (C) The Ambassador took the opportunity to raise the upcoming vote for the Security Council. She explained that the United States supported Guatemala for the open seat slotted for the region. The Security Council faced an enormously important agenda and it was critical to have responsible members. She recognized that Haiti and Venezuela had an important relationship but noted that Guatemala was a member of MINUSTAH and also an important partner. The PM agreed that Haiti had important ties with both countries and assured the Ambassador he would discuss the issue with President Preval, who he understood would retain the final decision on critical foreign policy issues.

¶ 8. (C) Comment. The atmosphere was overwhelmingly positive during this first formal meeting between the Ambassador and the PM. The PM was engaging and business-like, demonstrating a command of issues and how he intends to proceed. The PM displayed a hint of sensitivity in discussing the need to exercise more control over the provision of international assistance, but also demonstrated appreciation and willingness to engage and cooperate. The PM did not respond to the Ambassador's pointed remark that she hoped the government would free Neptune. Based on this and other conversations with Preval, it is clear that the Preval administration hopes that somebody else, namely the judges hearing the case, will solve the problem for them.

SMITH